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SPY TRIAL DELAY SPURS SUGGESTIONS OF DEAL
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WASHINGTON

A third delay in the spy trial of a Ghanaian accused of seducing a woman CIA clerk to get classified information raised speculation Tuesday that a plea bargain or spy swap may be in the works.

A Justice Department spokesman would only confirm that federal Judge Claude Hilton, during a closed hearing Monday, delayed until Dec. 9 the opening of the espionage trial of Michael Asboutui Soussoudis.

It was the third postponement since the 39-year-old Ghanaian was indicted for espionage. The trial initially was set to begin in early October in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Va., just across the Potomac River from Washington.

Speculation over the next turn in the case was heightened by the presence of Eric K. Otoo, Ghana's ambassador in Washington, at Monday's closed hearing.

There have been suggestions that Soussoudis, who has been identified as a first cousin of Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings, head of the ruling Ghanaian Provisional National Defense Council, might be exchanged for two Ghanaians now held in the African nation as CIA informants.

Soussoudis is charged with obtaining classified information from Sharon Marie Scranage, 29, a CIA clerk, while she was stationed in Accra, the Ghanaian capital, from 1983 to 1984.

Scranage originally was charged with conspiring with Soussoudis to commit espionage. She allegedly provided her lover with the names of two CIA informants in Accra, supplied information about Ghanaian dissidents and revealed what the CIA knew about Ghana's arms requests from Cuba.

In a plea bargain, she agreed to testify against Soussoudis and pleaded guilty to two of the original 15 counts. She is free on bail awaiting sentencing.

Two Ghanaians, one said to be an employee of the U.S. Embassy in Accra and the other a Ghanaian intelligence agent, have been arrested by Ghanaian authorities and charged with supplying secrets to the CIA, allegedly as a result of information Scranage was said to have given Soussoudis.

Following Monday's hearing, there was speculation that discussions may be under way to free Soussoudis as part of a swap for the two, or that he might be trying to arrange a guilty plea in exchange for a lesser sentence.

Plea bargains are not uncommon in espionage cases in which the government faces the possibility of being forced to reveal sensitive intelligence information in order to prove its case at trial.

Neither prosecution nor defense lawyers would discuss Monday's hearing, which was held under provisions of the Classified Information Procedures Act.

Soussoudis was arrested last June by FBI agents while meeting with Scranage at a Holiday Inn in Springfield, Va.

His lawyers have been unsuccessful in efforts to have charges against him dismissed on grounds the United States cannot prosecute a foreigner for alleged criminal actions not committed under U.S. jurisdiction.

Prosecutors say the Springfield meeting is enough to establish U.S. jurisdiction and note that while Soussoudis held a Ghanaian passport, he also has been a permanent resident alien of the United States since 1970, despite his visits to Ghana since then.